DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 245 489 EC 162 849

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TITLE A Summer Camp Model for Maintenance of Academic and Behavioral Attainment for Severely Behaviorally Handicapped Children.
PUB DATE Apr 84
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children (62nd, Washington, DC, April 23-27, 1984).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Behavior Disorders; *Day Camp Programs; Elementary Education; Program Descriptions; Program Effectiveness; *Summer Programs

ABSTRACT

A summer day camp program was offered to 32 students (grades 2-6) enrolled at the Transitional School (Ohio), a school for severely behaviorally handicapped students. The program was designed to maintain the positive effects of the school intervention during the summer months. Camp staff included six learning disability/behavior disorder certified teachers who served as camp counselors. The 5-week camp program involved academics, behavior management, recreational activities, and field trips. Campers were chosen for participation in the program on the basis of the level of functioning they had achieved by the end of the regular school year and/or on the basis of a home environment that was known to be abusive or seriously neglectful. The Centennial School Behavior Checklist was used to determine the program's effectiveness. Data indicated that following the camp experience students maintained their high level of functioning, at least behaviorally. However, noncampers (those who were not chosen for the camping program because they either came from stable home environments or had achieved lower functional levels) also maintained their statuses. (SW)

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A Summer Camp Model for Maintenance of Academic and Behavioral Attainment for Severely Behaviorally Handicapped Children

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Introduction

Teachers at the Transitional School, a Re-ED (Hobbs, 1982) modeled program for severely behaviorally handicapped students in Youngstown, Ohio reported each September for several years that their students regressed behaviorally and academically during the summer interim. Of particular concern were those students who had completed the previous shcool year at high levels of behavioral self-control but who re-entered in September having lost much of this acquired competence. The problem was particularly acute among elementary and junior high level students. Many of these children had acquired by June sufficient skills to be considered ready or nearly ready for re-entry into regular programs in September. However, at the end of the summer, upon returning to school, teachers found that the children were no longer functioning at their previous high levels. Of equal concern were those students whose home environments were considered to be severely dysfunctional and highly contributory to the development of seriously disturbed behavior in the children. In a few cases, the children were in serious need of an opportunity to spend time each day outside of their homes.

The problem seemed to lie in the lack of continuity in ecological intervention during the summer. Clearly, a summer program was needed in view of these problems. The effectiveness of a summer camp experience for children with severe behavior disorders has been suggested by Rickard and Dinoff (1971). The program necessarily would need to focus on academic maintenance,

behavior control, and recreation. To be effective, the program would have to incorporate a treatment model similar to that employed by the school, but sufficiently different to provide a sense of vacation for the campers. Also, in view of current economic limitations, the program would have to be run within the confines of a narrow budget. The solution was proposed in the form of a summer day camp managed by a mental health facility and staffed with teachers from the school. Such a camp program was seen as a means by which the child's ecological system would be enhanced during the summer in order to maintain the positive effects of the school intervention during the academic year.

Description of the School. The Transitional School is a program of the Youngstown City Schools in consortium with psychology and resource staff of the Diagnostic and Evaluation Clinic, a mental health facility of Mahoning County, Ohio. The school serves up to 240 students identified as severely behaviorally handicapped. The school includes kindergarten through twelfth grades. At each of the primary, intermediate, and senior levels, there are also classes for students who present behavior disorders and developmental handicaps (EMR). The student population is comprised of males and females in a ratio of approximately four boys to one girl, and representing Black, White, and Hispanic populations. While the majority of students are from the City of Youngstown, a significant portion are transported from suburban districts. Within each classroom there is a maximum of ten students with a teacher and an aide. Students are referred into the program upon identification by a multidisciplinary team at their home schools.

The program focuses upon implementation of both educational and behavioral objectives. Individualized educational plans

are devised for each student. Daily lessons are provided for each student at a series of stations. By completing the work at each station, a student earns a prescribed number of points. To accomplish behavioral objectives, a system of five levels is employed. Each student enters the program at level I and progresses to successively higher levels by earning a prescribed number of points for appropriate behavior. With each level, the student is given increased privileges and responsibilities. Points can be lost for various infractions, such as being off task, out of area, making inappropriate comments, not controlling hands or feet, and not following directions. "Level busts" are applied to more serious offenses. Once a student has reached level V and has maintained himself for thirty days at this level, he can be considered for placement back in his regular school.

Being a public school facility, the program operates only from September through early June. Therefore, for three months of the year, little or no intervention is provided for the students. The children must attempt to maintain their gains within the family and neighborhood ecosystem which contributed to their behavior disorders. As a result, the dysfunctional behavior is reinforced and skills gained often are lost. Recognizing the problem and the need, the staff developed a summer day camp program funded as a community mental health special project. The program described in this report is intended as a solution to the problem.

Camp Challenge

A. Participants. Thirty-two boys and girls were selected to participate in the program. Participants resided in both urban and suburban locales. The children were second (7 years) through sixth (12 years) graders and were accepted into the program upon

teacher recommendation. Students were enrolled on the basis of their need for a maintenance program according to their level standing by May or on the basis of a home environment which was known to be abusive or seriously neglectful. Six of the children were from this latter category. In many cases both factors co-existed. Children who either had not reached level IV by April or those at lower levels whose homeswere relatively stable were not included. Of the original forty students invited to participate, thirty-two entered the program.

Campers were divided into four groups, each with eight children. A counselor (teacher) and an aide were assigned to each group.

B. Staff. The camp staff were comprised of thirteen personnel. An administrator served to raise funds, to ready, the camp site, to coordinate services including transportation and provision of lunches, to arrange field trips, and to requisition supplies. Six LD/BD certified teachers served as camp counselors. Four of these teachers provided educational instruction and athletic or recreational activities. Of these, one teacher also served as a teacher coordinator. This position was charged with the tasks of developing academic goals based upon recommendations of the classroom teacher at school and of serving as a resource to other camp staff. Teachers, or counselors, were responsible for developing daily lesson plans for each of the campers in the group of eight. Two of the teachers served as instructional specialists for activities in camping skills and outdoor education. Four trained teacher aides were selceted to serve as counselor aides to assist counselors in behavior management, academics, and recreational activities. Also, one aide was assigned to accompany campers

on the bus to and from camp each day. Lastly, two undergraduate university students provided additional athletic and recreational assistance.

C. Camp Facility. The camp site was converted from an old overnight camp for needy children which was no longer being used. A large activity room/mess hall structure was used as a multipurpose room to house learning stations, camp store, and lunch and recreational activities in inclement weather. A smaller bungalow housed outdoor education/science programs, and a covered patio was used as a camping skills instruction area. Athletic activities were held in a large outdoor area adjacent to the row of buildings. The site was located on the edge of a large municipal park with picnic facilities and nature trails which could be used by the campers.

D. Program. The camp was held during a five-week period. Campers attended four days per week. Three of the days each week were devoted to a combination of acadmeic and recreational activities, and the fourth day was reserved for field trips. The fifth day was used by counselors to develop and modify lesson plans, activity plans and behavior goals. The camp program involved academics, behavior management, recreational activities, and field trips.

Academics. Individualized goals were developed by the counselor coordinator in consultations with the school teachers for all of the campers. The purpose of such goals and plans was maintenance of academic skills only. Daily lesson plans were prescribed by each teacher. Any combination of learning stations with assignments in mathematics, language arts, spelling, and reading could be assigned according to a camper's needs. Interspersed among the

learning stations were free-time stations in which students could elect to engage in a game, arts and crafts or some other recreational activity. This model was adapted from that described by West, et al. (in Maxwell, 1980) in which the likelihood that a student will complete an academic task is enhanced when the task is followed by a period of recreational activity. A period at a free-time station was allowed if a camper completed academic work as assigned. Points for academics were not given, unlike the system at school, since skill acquisition was not the object, as it would be during the academic year. Counselors and aides were available to provide instructional assistance at any time. In addition to this complement of academic activities, group instruction was provided in outdoor education and camping skills. Through outdoor education, science topics were introduced which could be put to use in the camp program in activities such as nature hikes and overnight camp-out. In the camping skills sessions, campers were taught the basics of pitching tents, whittling, cooking, packing, etc. By the nature of the focus, group cooperation, participation, and adherence to the concensus were emphasized. In both of these subject areas, safety principles were introduced.

Behavior Management. As in school, campers were able to earn points for appropriate behavior and to lose points for unacceptable behavior. Points were tallied at the end of each activity period and totaled at the end of each day. Each camper could earn a maximum of 150 points per day (25 for each of six periods). Unlike school, a level system based on point accumulation was not employed, since the focus was upon maintenance and not acquisition. For each camper, a maintenance level was established according to the child's ability to perform. A maximum acceptable

number of "slips" per day was set for each camper. If the maintenance level of earned points was reached three out of four days, the camper could exchange his points for games or supplies purchased at the camp store. Points could be accumulated over a period of weeks in order to "buy" expensive items. Campers who reached their maintenance level by the fourth week and who held it consistently through the fourth and fifthweeks were permittted to participate in an overnight camping trip.

Field Trips/Recreation. Recreation was provided in several ways. As mentioned earlier, individual recreational activities were offered interspersed with academics as reinforcements for completing tasks. These included individual games and arts and crafts activities. Group recreational activities were provided in the form of athletics and in outdoor education sessions involving nature hikes and picnics.

Another important recreational element was provided through field trips. These were included in the program as a means of providing both academic enhancement and behavioral incentives through recreational events. One field trip each week was offered. The first three trips allowed for academic focusing. Campers visited a zoo where they were able to observe animals which had been discussed in outdoor education. In the petting zoo section, they learned how to handle several of the animals. This was considered preparatory to the overnight camping trip. On another trip, campers visited a fish hatchery at a nearby lake where swimming and water slides were included for recreation afterwards. Again, science and outdoor education and safety were emphasized. The third field trip focused upon mathematics and money with a visit to a supermarket. The campers visited the bakery to observe

food preparation and to learn about quantity through use of recipes. Also, the campers bought supplies for the overnight camping trip. For recreation, roller skating was included on this trip. The fourth field trip, swimming, was intended as a behavioral incentive, in that campers could attend only if they had achieved their maintenance level for the first three days of the week. Similarly, the fifth trip, overnight camping, was offered to students only if maintenance had been achieved for the entire previous two weeks. For this trip, campers had to utilize skills gained in outdoor education and camping sessions. The trip had a benefit behaviorally, in that campers developed a sense of group cohesiveness, and the experience necessitated cooperative behavior by all.

Program Effectiveness

The Centennial School Behavior Checklist (Lentz and Torpey, 1982) was administered as a means of determining differences in behavior among campers and non-campers. Also, the checklist was intended to provide information regarding the effectiveness of the camp program in helping students to maintain behavioral levels during the summer. The checklist was completed by teachers for each student in May and October. Teachers were instructed to rate each student on every item along a seven point scale. The scale aims at rating students in terms of the frequency with which they engage in desirable and unacceptable behaviors. An analysis of variance (two-way ANOVA) was performed with the results summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Analysis of Variance of Behavior Ratings
of Students Attending Camp Program
vs. Students Not Attending Camp Program

Source	S.S.	df	M.S.	F
Pre-/Post-Camp (A)	-0.01	1	-0.01	-0.01
Camp/Non-Camp (B)	5.74	1	5.74	5.52*($p<.05$)
Interaction (AxB)	0.03	1	0.03	0.03
Within Groups (S/AB)	58.06	56	1.04	

No significant difference was found for pre-camp vs. post-camp (spring vs. fall) administrations. On the other hand, a significant difference ($p < .05$) was found between the campers vs. the non-campers. The interaction also was found not to be significant. The Centennial School Behavior Checklist results support the notion that the campers constituted a separate group of students. Concurrently, it appears that neither group changed significantly from spring to fall.

A further attempt was made to determine whether any changes occurred between spring and fall administrations of the checklist on seventeen selected items within each group of students. Data analysis by t-test failed to reveal any significant differences.

Interpretation

The results indicate that two distinct groups of students, in fact, were identified, and that the campers constituted a separate group from all others. In view of the selection process, this is not surprising. Rather, the data confirm the teachers' impressions of their students' appropriateness for camp referral. On the other hand, it was expected that there would be differences in the fall among students who had attended camp as compared with those who had not. It was expected that those who had attended

camp would have maintained their behavioral levels, while non-campers would have slid backwards. The failure to demonstrate such a difference is at first glance surprising. Further consideration of the two groups may explain the lack of significant differences. The students who did not attend camp finished the academic year at levels I, II, or III. Possibly, these students, having made only small gains during the acadmic year, had little to lose and little room for backsliding during the summer interim. Therefore, they registered no significant difference behaviorally from spring to fall. Oppositely, the campers, the majority of whom completed the academic year at levels IV and V. These students, therefore, had considerable room to slide backwards behaviorally during the summer. The data suggest that this did not happen, but rather that the campers maintained their previous high levels.

Implications

The concept of a day camp as a means to achieve behavioral and academic maintenance for children with severe behavioral handicaps during the summer interim would seem to hold worthwhile possibilities. According to earlier teachers' reports and observations, many children who had reached high levels in the school program by spring would return in the fall at lower levels. However, the data indicate that following the camp experience, these students maintained their high level of functioning, at least behaviorally. Unfortunately, the data are still somewhat vague, since non-campers (students at lower point levels) also maintained their statuses. Perhaps, these students did not appear to lose ground, because in fact there was little to lose; perhaps, too, the small gains they had made during the school year were relatively easily maintained in the summer without any supportive effort.

In any event, it is clear that further investigation is needed. Additionally, data need to be collected in more easily quantifiable terms. To avoid problems of inter-rater reliability and rater bias, behavior ratings need to be performed by trained observers and raters. Also, the matter of academic skill maintenance requires attention as well. Thus, achievement measures in spring and fall need to be obtained to demonstrate effectiveness in this area. These issues are being addressed currently and steps will be implemented in these directions. From the preliminary data, though, it appears that a camp program can be an effective and relatively inexpensive means to achieve academic and behavioral maintenance among severely behaviorally handicapped students.

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Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children (62nd, Washington, DC, April 23-27, 1984)